was a first for Monks Wood. Mostly confined to East Anglia and Essex, this specimen is more likely to have come from the large population at nearby Woodwalton Fen NNR than from any new breeding site.

Five specimens of the Pale Pinion *Lithophane hepatica* (Noctuidae) were trapped during the period 19 September – 2 October 2003. Not recorded at the site before, this sparsely distributed but locally common species appears to be extending its range. It should certainly be looked out for away from its southern and western strongholds.

My thanks to Nick Greatorex-Davies for alerting me to these interesting discoveries, supplying me with useful background information, and for running the trap so well in the first place.— PHILIP J L GOULD, Co-ordinator, Light-trap Network, Rothamsted Insect Survey, Plant & Invertebrate Ecology Division, Rothamsted Research, Harpenden, Hertfordshire AL5 2JQ (E-mail: phil.gould@bbsrc.ac.uk).

***Acronicta rumicis* L. (Lep.: Noctuidae) extreme melanic ab. *lugubris* Schultz in Kent, and continued decline in melanism**

The aberration *lugubris* Schultz of *Acronicta rumicis* is black with almost complete obliteration of the lighter markings retained by ab. *salicis* Curtis. Kettlewell (1973. *The Evolution of Melanism*) regards it as an industrial melanic, common in the Barnsley area of West Yorkshire, and a short series from there is in the National (RCK) Collection in the British Museum (Natural History). The aberration retains the white tornal spot on the forewings and it is very conspicuous, but the line of subterminal dots is almost absent.

On 15 August 2003, a specimen was noted at my garden mv light at Dartford; I can find no reference to other specimens being observed in either Kent or the London area. It is interesting that this specimen should be noted at a time when melanism in the species has reached a very low level.

| Year | % typical | % melanic | Sample size |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1995 – 1999 | 92.1 | 7.9 | 82 |
| 2000 | 93.3 | 3.7 | 53 |
| 2001 | 96.0 | 4.0 | 71 |
| 2002 | 97.2 | 2.8 | 71 |
| 2003 | 96.2 | 3.8 | 104 |
| 2004 | 100.0 | 0 | 72 |

*Acronicta rumicis* (L.): Percentage of typical form and ab. *salicis* Curtis at garden mv trap in Dartford, 2000 - 2004

The last report on the decline of melanism in *A. rumicis* in north-west Kent appeared during 2000 in this Journal; it illustrated a fall from 20% of ab. *salicis* in 1976 to an average of 6.1% for the five year period 1995-1999 inclusive. For the five year period 2000-2004 its incidence halved to 2.8%. This decline is summarised in Table 1.— B. K. WEST, 36 Briar Road, Dartford, Kent DA5 2HW.

**Retreats for Peacock Butterflies *Inachis io* L. (Lep.: Nymphalidae) in changing weather conditions**

On 28 April 2005, I observed two peacock butterflies fly directly and with masterly precision into one of two holes under a two-metre gorse bush, part of a rabbit run at the edge of a wooded clearing on Alderley Edge, Cheshire. The weather conditions were just in the process of changing from warmth and sunshine to being overcast with the beginning of rain, when the two butterflies, some five seconds apart, flew directly into the two openings, each some 20 cm up and across, neatly navigating the small space and overhang of gorse. The bush, on closer inspection, had a hollowed out centre and the butterflies had disappeared into the midst of it. I was particularly surprised by the occurrence of one specimen following another. The bush was very likely being used as shelter; perhaps they were familiar with the location as a roost. Another possibility is that the couple could have been a mating pair and the butterfly is known to choose secluded spots for mating (Baker, R. R.,1972. Territorial behaviour of the Nymphalid butterflies, *Aglais urticae* (L.) and *Inachis io* (L.). *J. Animal Ecology* **41:** 453-469). Whichever, this strongly suggests the value of shrubs as a resource for resting, roosting or shelter in *Inachis io*. — R. L. H. DENNIS, Remar, 4 Fairfax Drive, Wilmslow, Cheshire SK9 6EY.

**"Birching" for moths**

On 18 March 2005, we were moth recording in the company of Mr Peter Franghiadi at Stover Country Park, Newton Abbot, Devon. It was a misty night and the temperature was 11°C. Away from the traps which had been set up SH noticed moths sitting on birch twigs. Further inspection revealed a number of species and many were seen with their proboscises presumably imbibing water from the birch twigs. There must have been a very thin layer of water on the twigs as in places drops had formed. It was however, from the twigs themselves not the visible drops that the moths were drinking. We were only able to inspect the lower branches and the growth around the base of the trees.

The commonest moth on the twigs was *Conistra vaccinii* – a total of 31, including a mating pair, was counted on five trees inspected. Other moths observed on the birch twigs were singles of *Orthosia munda*, *O. gothica*, *Eupsilia transversa*, *Ypsolopha ustella* and *Acleris notana* or *ferrugana*.

We did also look on other tree species, but the moths were few in comparison with the birch. On oak we saw one *O. gothica* resting and a mating pair of *C. vaccinii*. On sallow, one *O. cerasi* was noted.